

almost unrestricted by law. The law we have are not enforced or evaded; but still "*Laus Deo promittitur*." A hint might be taken from railroad carriages, which rise in the centre of the roof, for ventilation and height.

Q.

## PUBLIC COMPETITIONS.

HULL—DURHAM.

Is it not surely high time for both engineers and architects to enter their decided and unanimous protest against the disgraceful local favouritism continually manifested in what are most falsely designated public competitions?

The letter of a "Candidate," in last week's *BUILDER*, comes most opportunely in aid of the remarks by another, though brief, correspondent, respecting the mapping survey of Reading.

But one gross and scarcely credible point in the Hull sanitary surveyorship demands that the public attention be more specifically drawn to it. What, friend editor, would a physician or surgeon, entering the field on a vacancy at an hospital, infirmary, or asylum, say, if the governors or committee merely read the formal application for the vacant appointment, and on the plea of unusual pressure from the number of candidates, *buried* their testimonials, as in this redoubtable case of the surveyorship for Wilberforce's memorable town of Kingston-upon-Hull?

The insult, as well as injustice, thus inflicted upon fifty-four unsuccessful competitors, "comprising," as the "Candidate" states, "some names of note," is truly beyond all endurance. Well, indeed, may thy shrewd correspondent put the opposite case of a merchant or tradesman perpetrating the reckless folly of *advertising* for a clerk, when he had in his own mind "predetermined to take his neighbour's son!" Although myself a member of another profession (an architect), it so happens that for a much esteemed and talented friend, I have, in three instances, made some efforts indirectly to serve him. It was in the case of similar appointments for the surveyorship of Norwich, Sunderland and Gateshead. But the *almost* I attempted to do was to solicit the parties to whom I wrote, to *endeavour* to see that fair play was used; and that every candidate had that position in the deciding committee's judgment to which their testimonials entitled them. And here let me remark, that in an open competition, the official parties, with whom rests the ultimate election, must, as regards all *stranger* applicants, be entirely governed by the apparent truthfulness of those very "credentials," which, in the case of Hull, were entirely swamped and thrown aside as so much waste paper.

My previous knowledge of kindred movements on the part of municipal and other public bodies in regard to the selection of designs for churches, town halls, and other structures, brings to recollection one memorable example of local favouritism and its final results. An edifice, stipulated by the printed instructions to competing architects to cost 15,000*l.* and no more, was duly erected in a midland town of some importance. The firm of which I was then and years after a partner (though resigning the active pursuit of the profession in 1834) were amongst the competitors, and received the second prize.

The building was erected, and cost 25,000*l.* The committee refused to extend their payments beyond the original 15,000*l.*, and the architects, unable to obtain tenders within that amount, became wound up with the contractors, and, shortly after the completion of the building, were in the *Gazette*!

There are persons, probably, who will reason that, in this instance, the architects were wholly to blame. Not entirely so: the drawings and the material were well known to many of the influential inhabitants, and our unhesitating opinion was again and again openly expressed, that *such a building in such a material* could never be executed for the required sum. The building committee persisted, and, Shylock-like, demanding the strict fulfilment of their bond, both architects and sureties were finally ruined!

But to come more closely to our present subject, a letter is now before me from a highly respectable friend in the county of Durham, stating, that in the case of the Sunderland surveyorship, one of three candidates, from whom the last choice was to be made, had obtained a majority, but the parties voting for the remaining two, united in favour of the local candidate of these two, and thereby, of course, defeated his friend's majority!

Further comment is needless. I repeat, it is high time that some decided effort be made to put an end to this gross insult to the respective professions, under the pretence of public competition. Thy friend, E. S. R.

## Books.

*A Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh.*

By AUSTIN HENRY LAYARD, Esq., D.C.L. Abridged by him from his larger work; with numerous woodcuts. Murray, Albemarle-street. 1851.

THIS is a new volume of Murray's "*Reading for the Rail*." Although purchaseable for a crown piece, and printed in a clear and good-sized type, we seem rather to be reading the original itself than a mere abridgement, in its pages, everything popularly interesting being preserved, while the second part of the original work has been omitted, the author having introduced into the narrative itself the principal biblical and historical illustrations, thus rendering the whole complete, though at a cost so trifling.

Dr. Layard, writing in September last, says, in his preface, that he is still inclined to believe that all the ruins explored represent the site of ancient Nineveh, and, whilst still assigning the later monuments to the kings mentioned in Scripture, Shalmanezzer, Sennacherib, and Esarhadon, he is convinced that a considerable period elapsed between their foundation and the erection of the older palaces of Nimroud. The results of the attempts to decipher the inscriptions were then, as he adds, still too uncertain to authorise the use of any actual names for the earlier kings mentioned in them.

While alluding to this subject of relative antiquity, it strikes us as worth while to quote a remark of the author, which will be found on page 356 of this abridgement, to the effect that "as in Egypt, the more ancient monuments show the purest taste and the highest knowledge of art, and we have that phenomenon which is to be remarked in the history of all nations, ancient or modern, of a gradual decline of art after a state of comparative perfection." Schlegel, in his "*Philosophy of History*," long ago pointed out the very same singular fact, so inconsistent with the ordinary idea of extreme antiquity, and the advancement of man out of that extreme antiquity from a savage state to a civilised. Dr. Layard appears to have added another proof to the truth of Schlegel's remark,—to the truth, shall we say, of Schlegel's idea that even the most extreme antiquity, in its traces of a high but declining art and luxury, denotes the prevalence of some still more perfect and exalted state of mankind, in still more extreme antiquity, of which we have no record at all in archaeological remains? Perhaps the only conceivable idea of it is to be traced in any record may be involved in the question,—What sort of state of society, or of mankind, could that have been in which "the angels of God" associated with "the daughters of men?" It is at least a curious circumstance, that in those times of extreme antiquity of which we have any archaeological record, the supernatural is always singularly mixed up with the natural—gods with men. In the very case before us, Dr. Layard is of opinion that the singular palaces which he has excavated were a sort of temple-palaces, whose presiding genius was a priest as well as king, and he is even represented on the sculptures as ministered to by angels. One of our own writers in *THIS BUILDER*, some time since, we remember, speaking of the glorious statuary and architecture of ancient Greece, enthusiastically declared that they were not the works of men but

of demi-gods. He was doubtless only demi-serious in saying so; but the archaeological discoveries of the last half hundred years are at all events leading us to trace the human race backwards through the mists of ages, not into states of "primitive simplicity" and rudimentary and savage imperfection; but, on the contrary, into states of comparative perfection, themselves a mere declining remnant of still more ancient and exalted states of which we have no record whatever, unless it be in that oldest as well as most precious of books, the Bible.

The contents of Dr. Layard's work are so well known, that we had not thought of giving any quotation from it, but there is one point, namely, the roofing of the palaces and the consequent lighting of its central chambers, as to which we may adduce the author's opinion, which is in accordance with that of Mr. Ferguson:—

"The mode of roofing the palaces and lighting the chambers, many of which were in the very centre of the building, with no other inlet for light but the door, is one of the most difficult questions in Assyrian architecture. I am inclined, on the whole, to concur with Mr. Ferguson in thinking that light was admitted through galleries or open rows of low pilasters above the alabaster slabs, and that wooden columns were sometimes used to support the roof in the larger halls. It is, however, remarkable that no remains whatever of columns have been discovered, nor are there any traces of them. Unless they were employed, the chambers exceeding a certain width must have been left open to the sky. There is no proof whatever of any of the rooms having been vaulted, although the Assyrians were well acquainted with the principle of the arch.

The chambers were paved with alabaster slabs, covered with inscriptions recording the name and genealogy of the king, and the chief events of his reign, or with baked bricks, or rather tiles, each also bearing a short inscription. The alabaster slabs were laid upon bitumen. The bricks or tiles generally in two layers, one above the other, with sand between and beneath them probably (like the bitumen) to exclude damp. Between the flues and bulls forming the entrances, was usually one large inscribed or ornamented slab. The drains discovered beneath almost every chamber in the older palace of Nimroud joined a large drain, probably running from under the great hall into the river, which originally flowed at the foot of the mound. The interior of the Assyrian palaces must have been as magnificent as imposing."

As to the lighting of the central chambers of the temple palaces, if these buildings really were temples as well as palaces, it might be asked whether they were not sacred enclosures, like the sanctum sanctorum of the Jewish Temple, *not lighted at all from without*. In the Egyptian temples, the priests, who were physicians of the body as well as of the soul, were said to have cured the people by taking them into the temple and throwing them into what has been called "the temple sleep"—most probably in dark, silent, and secret chambers—wherein "the god possessed"—the sleepers, who were said to be "changed into a divine personality" during the "invocations of the god"—prescribed the proper remedies for the diseased, delivering them as oracles, like those of Delphi, in whom "the god" was said to speak through the mouths of the "possessed." These prescriptions were said to have been inscribed or sculptured on the walls of the temples, and ascribed to *Æsculapion* as "the god."

We do not offer this as our own opinion but simply as a remark which suggests itself.

*A Technical Dictionary; or, a Dictionary explaining the Terms used in all Arts and Sciences.* By GEORGE CRABB, Esq., M.A. author of "*The Universal Technological Dictionary*," &c. Maxwell, Lincoln's-inn. 1851.

So far as it goes this abridgement of Mr. Crabb's larger work will be found very useful; but we fear that the desire to produce a cheap volume has led to the exclusion of terms which ought to have been included in any dictionary pretending to explain "the terms used in all arts and sciences." E.g.: no such words as "*clerestory*," or "*hagnoscope*," or even "*squat*," will here be found as architectural